Nature's Call

An Activity Newsletter for Kids by Utah's Project WILD -- Spring 1994

The Amazing Mojave!

Sometimes people think that deserts are empty places -- hot, dry areas without plants and animals! But when you take a close look at Utah's Mojave desert, you'll see a desert that's really full of life -- full of plants and animals that are well-adapted to live there.

You'll find the Mojave desert down in the extreme southwest corner of Utah, near St. George. The Mojave desert crosses the border into Arizona and California and includes the famous Death Valley National Monument in California. **The Mojave is a HOT desert, and in Utah it can have air temperatures as high as 115 degrees in the summer. When the air is that hot, the surface of the ground can be 140 degrees! The Mojave desert is also very dry, and in Utah it receives less than 8 inches of rain yearly.**

In the world, there are over 20 different deserts; in North America, there are four. Utah has two deserts: the Mojave and the Great Basin. All deserts have two common characteristics: they all generally receive less than 10 inches of precipitation a year, and they all lose a lot of moisture through evaporation. Utah's Mojave desert is called a hot desert, whereas Utah's Great Basin is called a cold desert because it has cooler average temperatures year round and because it receives over half of its precipitation in the form of snow.

So Utah's Mojave desert is hot and dry! Yet there are lots of plants and animals that live there. The key to understanding how these plants and animals survive is to learn how they adapt to living with little water and lots of hot temperatures!

Here's your chance to explore!

Learn how these Mojave plants and animals adapt to desert life!

•As you read about each plant, look for the picture that you think best matches the description and write its name next to its picture.
•As you read about each animal, draw the animal into the desert landscape where you think you might see it.

•Some plants, like the tall Joshua-tree and the beavertail cactus, store water in their thick stems.

•The mesquite tree has a long tap root, often as long as 60 to 100 feet, that grows down to find water underground.

•A creosote bush has shallow roots that spread out beneath the surface of the ground. When it rains, these roots soak up the rain water.

Because plants lose water through their leaves:
•plants like creosote have small leaves.
•Mormon tea appears to have scales instead of leaves.
•bladder sage, with its papery seed bladders, drops its leaves when there is no water.

•Some cacti, like the barrel cactus, have spines which shade it from the hot sun. On the barrel cactus, there are so many spines that the fleshy stem is almost completely hidden.

•The desert tortoise and desert iguana get most of their water from the plants that they eat. The desert tortoise stores a lot of water in its body.

•Kangaroo rats get water from the seeds that they eat.

•The antelope ground squirrel uses its bushy tail to shade its body from the hot sun.

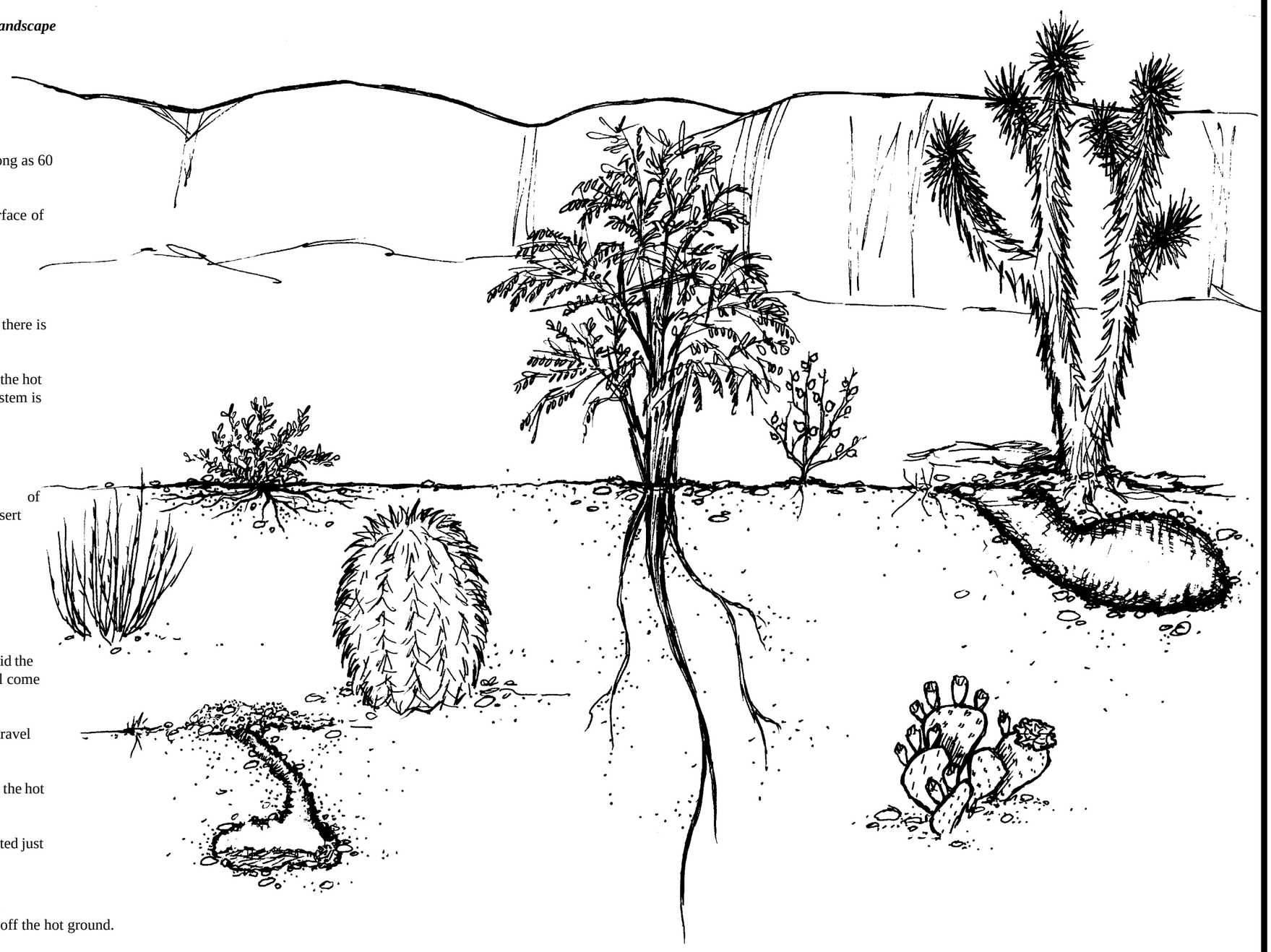
•Other animals, like the kit fox, the tarantula and the rattlesnake, avoid the hottest part of the day by staying in burrows underground. They all come out at night to hunt.

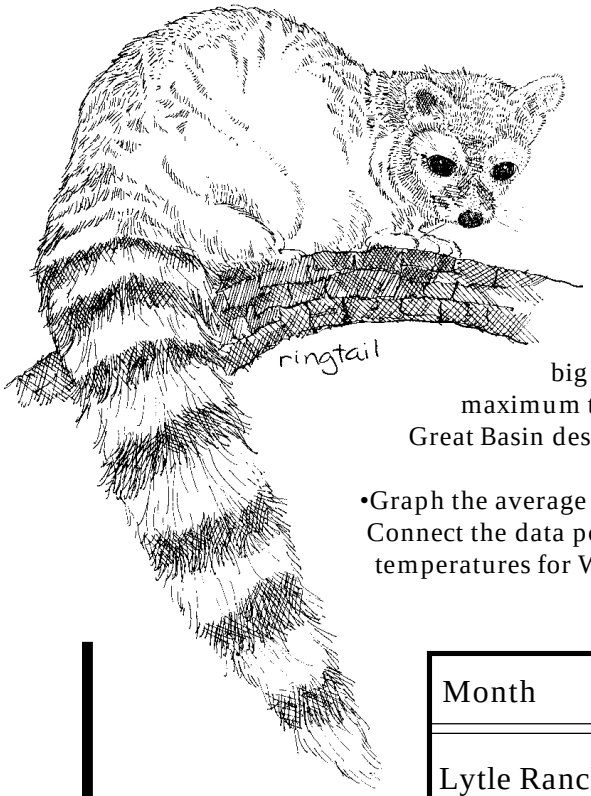
•The coyote also hunts at night and has long, strong legs so it can travel long distances to find water.

•Birds of prey, like the red-tailed hawk, fly in the cool air high above the hot ground.

•The black-tailed jack rabbit has HUGE ears with blood vessels located just below the skin so it can lose its body heat and stay cool.

•Lizards, like the collared lizard, zebra tailed lizard and leopard lizard, are small and have short legs and long toes that lift their body high off the hot ground.



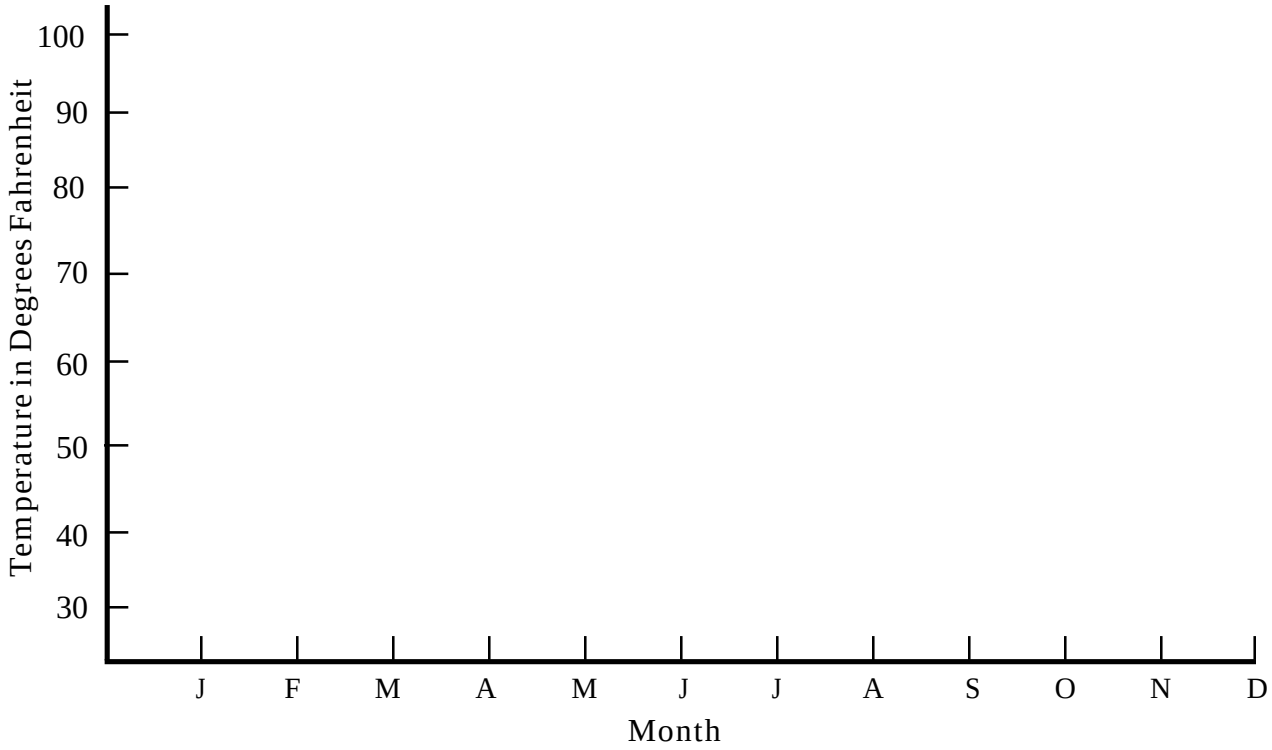


Some Like It Hot! And Some Like It Cold!

Utah has both hot and cold deserts. The Mojave is considered a hot desert, and the Great Basin is considered a cold desert. What is the difference between the Mojave and Great Basin deserts? One of the big differences is temperature. In the box below are the average monthly maximum temperatures for two weather stations in Utah. Wendover is in the Great Basin desert, and Lytle Ranch, west of St. George, is in the Mojave desert.

•Graph the average monthly maximum temperatures for Lytle Ranch on the graph. Connect the data points with a red line. On the same graph, plot the maximum monthly temperatures for Wendover. Connect the data points with a blue line.

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Lytle Ranch	55	60	66	80	85	95	100	98	93	80	64	55
Wendover	36	43	52	61	72	82	92	89	78	63	47	37



•Which months show the greatest difference in temperature between the two sites?
•Which location is found in a hot desert? Which is in a cold desert?
•In which location would you like to be in June? In December? Why? Describe how you think the desert would look at these times of year? How would you adapt to the temperatures?